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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 001421

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DEPARTMENT FOR ISN/CTR MCURRY, ALESTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/15/2016
TAGS: [AU](#) [KNNP](#) [PARM](#) [RS](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: U. S. EXPERTS MEET WITH TURKISH OFFICIALS ON
URANIUM SMUGGLING CASE

REF: A. STATE 4610
[1](#)B. 2005 ANKARA 4841

Classified By: Pol-Mil Counselor Timothy Betts, reason 1.4 b/d.

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: Officials from the Turkish Atomic Energy Authority (TAEK) and Turkish National Police (TNP) shared information concerning the August 2005 seizure of uranium (ref tels) with a US delegation from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory on March 2-3, 2006. TAEK officials and the US delegation discussed the tests completed on the uranium sample; our delegation were also able to view and photograph the container and packaging, and to take gamma-ray spectra measurements of the material. TNP officials provided an overview of cases in which nuclear items were offered for sale, along with details of the specific operation that led to this seizure of the uranium. The US delegation provided information about the international efforts to stop the illegal movement of nuclear material and encouraged Turkish participation in the IAEA International Technical Workgroup. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Background: During a sting operation in Istanbul on August 16, 2005, Turkish National Police arrested two individuals (a third individual was apprehended at a later date) who were attempting to sell 173 grams of uranium, that appeared to originate in a Cyrillic alphabet-using country. The material was stored in a glass bottle when seized and subsequently transferred to the Cekmece Nuclear Research and Training Center (CNAEM) outside Istanbul. Subsequent tests by the Turkish Atomic Energy Authority indicated that the material was low enriched uranium with an enrichment in U-235 of 17%. (Ref B) End Background.

[1](#)3. (U) Dr. David Smith, nuclear chemist and nuclear forensic scientist, and Dr. Zachary Koenig, a physicist and illicit nuclear trafficking analyst, both from the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) visited Turkey March 2-3, 2006 to meet with officials of the Turkish Atomic Energy Authority (TAEK) and Turkish National Police (TNP) to discuss the August 2005 seizure of uranium. The visit was broken into two parts; 1) March 2 meeting with TAEK officials at Cekmece; 2) March 3 meeting with TNP officials at the TNP regional HQ in Istanbul.

CNAEM Meetings

[1](#)4. (C) The U.S. delegation met with a team of nuclear scientists led by the Deputy Director of CNAEM, Hakan Anac. The TAEK scientists explained that only a test consisting of a single ICP mass spectrometer measurement was completed on the uranium sample. This test confirmed that the sample was 17% enriched. A copy of the test results were provide to the

U.S. team. CNAEM did not perform any tests to check for trace elements or impurities within the sample. Additional analyses were hindered due to the lack of available reference standards at CNAEM.

¶5. (U) Dr. Smith presented information on the Nuclear Smuggling International Technical Working Group (ITWG). This multinational working group brings together nuclear scientist and law enforcement officials to share experience and methods to stop the illegal movement of nuclear materials. The ITWG also works cooperatively with the IAEA on nuclear trafficking issues. Dr. Smith noted that Turkey had participated in the past in this working group and encouraged them to attend the next meeting which will take place in Germany in September ¶2006. CNAEM scientists responded that information obtained during past exercises with ITWG, provided them some of the information that they were able to utilize to establish the baseline for the uranium sample.

¶6. (C) The U.S. delegation was allowed to view the perfume box and glass bottle inside of which the uranium was and still is stored. It was noted that it appears the bottle may have been taken from a research laboratory, due to the markings and the manner in which the bottle is sealed with wax and a tamper string. Gamma-ray measurements with a hand-held radioisotope identification instrument, and Exploranium GR-135, confirm that it was uranium. Subsequent analysis of the gamma-ray spectra indicated that it was consistent with 17% enriched uranium. Anac agreed to allow pictures to be taken of the package and the bottle.

TNP Meeting

¶7. (U) The U.S. delegation met with Sahin Ciftci, Chief TNP Istanbul Financial Crimes Division and Burak Yanar, from the

HQ TNP Organized Crime Division, on March 3. Ciftci said that the sting operation was carried out by the financial crimes division because the TNP believed that the attempt to sell the uranium was only another scam attempt. Over the past 5 years, there have been 192 operations that have involved suspects trying to sell some type of supposedly nuclear material (red mercury, yoranium, cesium, etc.). Of

these 192 cases, only 12 had nuclear material and this case was the only one that had a significant amount of uranium. The other 11 cases were very low grade nuclear material which was not considered dangerous.

¶8. (C) Ciftci then accompanied the U.S. delegation to a briefing conducted by the officer which led the sting operation. This officer outline the events of the operation as follows:

- a. An informant had told him about a group of individuals that were attempting to sell some uranium. The officer requested the informant set up a meeting.
- b. The officer met with the individual selling the uranium. The original asking price was USD 7 million; the officer told the seller that he was interested in buying the material and would like to meet again in a week.
- c. A week later, the officer met again with the seller and two other individuals. The officer explained that he could only come up with \$200,000 USD. The sellers agreed to the price and handed the officer a perfume box which contained a glass bottle. The label on the bottle stated that it contained uranium 235 - 17.5%. At this point, the officer attempted to arrest the individuals. Two were arrested immediately, one escaped but was apprehended at a later date.
- d. The material was brought back to TNP HQ to be processed as evidence. The material was left in Ciftci's office for safety reasons while awaiting processing. After a couple hours, it was checked for radioactivity. This test was positive and TAEK was contacted to take custody of the item.

e. Once the suspects were informed that the material was really uranium, they stopped talking to TNP personnel.

¶9. (U) The U.S. delegation reviewed with the TNP officials other nuclear smuggling cases that have occurred in the region to further explain the international interest in this case. Also, an overview of the ITWG was provided emphasizing its role in promoting international cooperation by allowing countries to share their experiences in the fight against nuclear smuggling. Yanar thought this working group would be good for TNP as terrorism is being added to the responsibilities of the organized crime division.

¶10. (U) Comments: The seizure of uranium in August 2005 was the first significant nuclear material seizure by TNP. While the amount of significant information shared during this visit was not large, the openness and willingness of Turkish officials established a positive baseline for future cooperation. Turkish officials were open and appeared to view this exchange as an opportunity share information and improve future operations. Inclusion of Turkey in future IAEA ITWG activities will raise the awareness of Turkish authorities and increase the amount of significant information that Turkey shares in the future. End Comment.

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